

Investigative Hearing:
“How Can the Federal Government Assist State and Local Programs to Protect Citizens
and Communities Against Drug-Related Violence?”
Government Reform Committee
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources
Statement for the Record
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Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Cummings, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you regarding this important issue. We applaud your commitment to expanding federal support for community drug prevention activities and commend you for the Dawson Family Community Protection Act.

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) knows that drugs and crime, and in particular, violent crimes are intimately connected. The Drug-Free Communities Support Program and the Weed and Seed Program both enable many of our community coalition members to continue their work, and we thank the committee for your support on the Drug Free Communities Act Reauthorization and your commitment to community coalitions. We embrace the comprehensive effort those programs promote because they combine supply and demand reduction programs and we know they work.

Drugs have tremendous costs to society. Drug trafficking results in crimes when dealers compete for markets and customers. Disputes and rip-offs between buyers and sellers often lead to violence, and people who participate in the drug trade tend to be violent individuals. In 2000, there were almost 13,000 drug-related homicides (source: ONDCP table constructed from FBI Crime in the U.S.: Uniform Crime Reports). In 1999, 13 percent of jail inmates admitted committing an offense to get money for drugs. In total, drug use costs America \$276 billion a year -- \$110 billion for drugs and \$166 billion for alcohol. Drugs and alcohol together kill more than 120,000 Americans a year.

It is our experience that when citizens from all sectors of a community come together to address illicit drugs and related problems, people feel empowered and they not only believe they can have a substantial impact on reducing problems, they actually **do**. Taking a holistic approach to the drug problem, coalitions can mobilize the entire community. They know it isn't enough to simply take drug dealers off streets and arrest violent crime offenders. They know to really solve the problem they must reduce demand as well as supply – and they work to change the behaviors, norms and environment in the community. As neutral conveners, community coalitions help connect the various parts of the community by bringing together its leaders and developing multiple strategies across multiple sectors. Coalitions bridge the communication gap by coordinating the flow of information and activities between groups, including law enforcement and citizens. Law enforcement agencies are vital partners to the coalition.

As an example, the Safe Streets campaign in Tacoma, WA has made tremendous strides since its inception. Their strategy includes law enforcement, community policing, prevention/intervention/treatment and neighborhood revitalization. In 1991, local law enforcement estimated there were approximately 2,500 gang members. Since then, thanks to community coalitions working with local law enforcement, there are less than 500 known gang members. The Safe Streets campaign pulled together the entire community to take back their neighborhood and reclaim their streets – through neighborhood watches, law enforcement awareness programs, and active community participation in graffiti removal. That same community had more than 300 drive-by shootings related to illegal drugs in 1990. Today, that number is down to 1 or 2 drive-by shootings a year. This community has taken back what is rightfully theirs. They have rebuilt and maintained – through a sustained community-wide, comprehensive effort – a safer and healthier community.

At San Antonio Fighting Back, another CADCA member, which is a Drug-Free Communities Grantee and a Weed and Seed site, a city council person saw the need for citizens to help law enforcement find problem areas by becoming their eyes and ears, and the need for local law enforcement to listen to community input about brewing problems. Working together, coalition members obtained the necessary resources from government and private sources to implement a hotline and cell phone program, train people how to identify criminal activity, describe a location, and encourage them to call. Citizens became empowered and police got the help they needed to better target their efforts. A two-way respect developed and the program has led police to eliminate abandoned cars, empty homes, closed businesses and other problems. The coalition leader, Linda Tippins, said, “It was an eye opening, life enhancing initiative and we’re both better off for it.”

In Troy, Michigan, the coalition obtained the resources needed to bus kids to a local middle school for supervised activities and plan Friday night drug-free Jam Fests when police noticed that bored youth were loitering and causing trouble in the summertime. The coalition also used the grant to enable law enforcement to provide a Community Policing officer to work at the coalition offices. Facilitating give-and-take between police and citizens, coalition efforts recently stopped an advertised warehouse party before it could happen. Ann Comiskey, the coalition leader, says the federal government can really help her coalition and others by placing continued emphasis on youth programs for all children, not just at risk youth; continued funding for multi-jurisdictional "task forces" that address overarching problems; and funding for comprehensive programs that include prevention, intervention and treatment.

CADCA supports the federal government emphasizing collaboration between prevention and interdiction activities. In Huntsville, AL, we have seen the police chief take an active role fostering collaboration between his department and the community. Chief Owens believes law enforcement should be “a part *of* the community instead of *apart* from it.” His department is aggressively involved with community education. Their community watch group has an office in the precinct, helping to build solid, positive relations between officers and community citizens. He strongly believes in federal assistance to

increase collaboration between communities and law enforcement; more money and emphasis on prevention intervention especially early intervention; model policies to provide guidance; and an organization that provides housing and employment assistance to victims.

When citizens from all sectors of the community come together, they can have a tremendous impact. The partnership empowers citizens and facilitates law enforcement work. Working in a collaborative partnership, the various sectors of the community can find and address the root causes of problems and can take the preventive steps necessary to stop them from destroying neighborhoods and lives.

CADCA fully supports all efforts to reinforce comprehensive, community-wide efforts to stop the spread of illegal drugs and violent crime. The unifying factor in the communities I have spoken about today is the presence of a community coalition and its collaboration  local law enforcement. Community coalitions work because they fight city by city, street by street, block by block to help rid America of substance abuse and its related problems. Thank you again for holding this hearing and giving me an opportunity to testify. At this time I am happy to answer any questions you or any members of the committee may have.